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133 241 relief and the low temperatures limit the cultivation on any large scale. Most of the cultivated lands are located in the southeast, in the drainage area of the Cha-ku and the Black Rivers, on gentle slopes between an altitude of 5,000 to 9,000 ft.

133 241 433 Roughly speaking, over 50% of the total agricultural food stuffs produced in Lifan are produced along the Cha-Ku valley, between Weichow and Cha-ku-nao 茶谷脑, a distance of not more than 50 miles. And these crops are mostly grown on slopes rather than on alluvial plains at the valley bottoms. The total area of alluvial plains at the valley bottom between Weichow and Cha-ku-nao is smaller in area than the cultivated mountain slopes of even one mountain settlement, as for instance Chia-shan-chai 佳山寨. This shows the insignificance of alluvial lowlands and the importance of slope cultivation in the region. Besides the Cha-ku valley, the Black River valley which is the other tributary to the Min also has some fertile slope lands under cultivation. As all the valleys are separated by high mountains with steep slopes, the cultivated area on slopes is nowhere very extensive.

241 132 433 Besides the topographic limits of land utilization, climatic influences are also very strong. Though the climate varies from valley to valley, yet it is controlled by definite climatic laws. In regions where the altitude is below 6,000 ft. the summer temperature can go up as high as 86° F (30° C) and the minimum temperature during the hottest month, August, could go down to 57° F (14° C). On the average, the temperatures for six months, from the middle of October to the middle of April, are below the critical temperature for vegetation growth. That leaves a growing season of only about six months.

In the grasslands the annual average temperature is below 50° F. Even during the height of summer, the maximum temperature goes only as high as 74° or 75° during the day, and can go as far down as 33° F. The growing season is thus shortened to less than four months.

As far as moisture is concerned, the slopes that are below an altitude of 6,000 ft., being hidden between high mountain walls, are usually very dry, because little moisture can reach them. The average relative humidity for August last summer was below 50%. Between an altitude of 6,000 to 7,000, due to the orographic effect of air that is rising along the slopes, the average relative humidity for August last summer was below 60%, while the slopes above 7,000 ft. during the same period had an average relative humidity of about 80%. Thus during the severe drought in the summer, while the crops on the lower slopes were all withered and with no hope for any harvest, the oats, potatoes, and barley were flourishing on the upper slopes. The relative humidity is still higher as the altitude goes higher until it reaches the altitude of about 10,000 feet, when it begins to decrease again. Therefore, according to moisture distribution, the mountainous country is classified into four zones: the arid zone, the semi-arid zone, the humid zone, and the sub-humid zone.

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All the slopes that are below an altitude of 6,000 ft. belong to the arid zone, where cultivation without irrigation is difficult. Most of these slopes are barren or covered by only a thin mantle of scrub. At an altitude between 6,000 and 8,000 ft. is the semi-arid zone, where agriculture could be carried on without irrigation, but the situation is usually precarious. Unfortunately, most of the cultivable lands are situated in this zone. The dominating crops between 6,000 and 7,000 ft. are corn, beans, and wheat; and those grown between 7,000 and 8,000 ft. are mostly barley, oats, buckwheat, and potatoes.

From an altitude between 8,000 to over 9,000 ft. is the wet zone, and this is the forest zone. Above the forest zone is the sub-humid zone, and this is the grass land area where the high degree of wetness and the shortness of the growing season limit agriculture and favor the grazing of cattle. This is also the homeland of a great variety of medicinal herbs.

The limitations of relief and climate have in their turn affected the nature of the soil. Soil on the upper slopes, where agriculture is carried on, is subject to severe erosion; while soil on the valley bottoms is liable to be washed away by streams. Therefore, the most spectacular feature of the soil is that of instability. There is hardly any well-developed mature soil to be found anywhere. In the grasslands, the soil is better developed, but the temperature limits its utilization.

This is only a brief summary of the setting of the stage upon which a group of tribes people are carrying on their drama of life. Now, we will proceed to examine the tribes who are staged there.

B. THE TRIBES OF LI-FAN COUNTY

The total population of Li-fan county is about 80,000, which is about one-fourth the population of Chengtu. Of course there is no accurate census to tell the truth. This is only a rough estimate from the figures given by the Szechwan Commission of Education. Out of the total population, about one-eighth are Chinese and seven-eighths are tribes people. They are the Ch'iang羌, the Gia-rung 嘉戎, the Fan番, and the Black River peoples. They are all of Tibetan descent, with a combined or fused Tibetan-Chinese culture at different stages of development.

The Ch'iang people used to occupy a much larger area than they do now. Archaeological finds indicate that they had spread as far north as Kansu before the Han dynasty. During the Ming dynasty, because they made trouble, the Tibetans were called in to conquer them, and finally there were cornered into a smaller and smaller area between the Chinese on the plains, and the Tibetans in the mountains. At present the Ch'iang people are on the verge of disappearing, and their culture is already half-forgotten. The Gia-rung people are the Tibetan conquerors who have taken to agriculture, and the Fan are the Tibetans who have come to stay in the grasslands and are still leading a nomadic type of life. The Black River people are a mixed people of Fan, Gia-rung and Ch'iang. They are half agricultural, but still rely on their cattle for much of their living.